Dave McCann Jr.'s MGA

By Dave McCann Jr.

I got the MGA between GT-33 and GT-34, or around 2009. I got it from George Kress in Pittsburgh. He had several and was starting to thin out his collection. It was drivable, but the engine was not in the best condition. I drove it back and forth to Virginia at least twice before I got it into good enough shape to get it to Ohio. I think I had the head rebuilt at some point, but I ended up getting a different 1600 engine from a guy in Canada. That engine turned out to also have issues. My impression is that the guy knew how to rebuild MG engines but was cheap and reused too many parts. The third engine was an 1800 5-main and came out of a 69 MGB-GT that we had not gotten back on the road. To put a 5-main 1800 in an MGA requires changing the backing plate and some sort of MGA/MGB hybrid transmission (or other modifications). In the case of this car, I put in a 5-speed from Hi-Gear Engineering. Hi-Gear offered (still offers) an installation kit that included the MGA transmission mount and an MGB bell housing. I did need to change the backing plate to an earlier MGB backing plate, as it was easier than trying to fit the large bell housing in an MGA (if that is even possible).

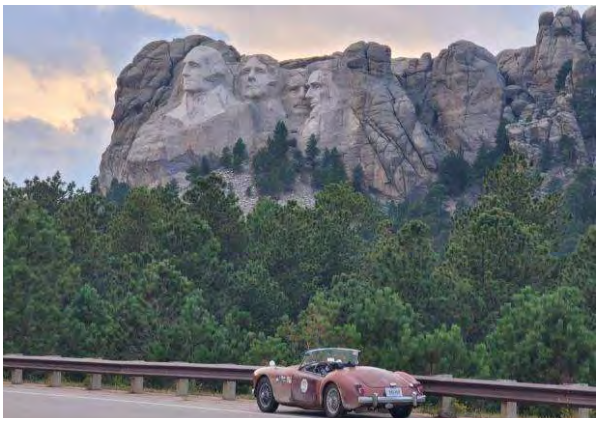
I did not drive the car to GT-34 in Hot Springs Arkansas, so the first GT it went to was GT-35 in Wisconsin. I do not recall what the state of the car was at that point, but the 1800/5-speed swap occurred before Rallye To Reno leading up to GT-36 in Reno. I don't recall many issues on the way to the West Coast, although I did have to replace the muffler. I was able to pick one up at Victoria British when we stopped there, and I was able to get the muffler installed in Dodge City the next day.

Seems like the bottom end of the 1800 got rebuilt over the winter between GT-36 and GT-37, but as GT-37 was in Dayton, it may have been the year after. The car went to GT-38 in Asheville, NC without issues and I don't recall much that I did to it before GT-39 in Ottawa, Canada. On the way back from Ottawa the 5-speed ran out of oil. I had to get the car towed, but after refilling the transmission it seemed to work fine. It ended up working fine for about three years, but then I had to replace it when the bearing that was damaged three years prior acted up again. Because of the bearing issue, I drove the car about a thousand miles in fourth gear (as the bearing did not cause problems with no load on the layshaft).

GT-40 in Michigan did not cause any issues for the car, and then the car did not go to GT-41 in Louisville as I drove the MGB-GT V8 instead. GT-42 in Solvang, CA was where the bearing

issue came back up. I left the car in San Francisco and drove my 64 MGB to Solvang, and then flew home. A friend helped me replace the transmission and then later drove the car home for me.

There were no issues with GT-43 in Virginia, GT-44 in Iowa, or GT-46 in New Jersey. For GT-47 I again had trouble with the car as I overheated in traffic in Louisville on my way to Colorado. Over the winter some friends and I swapped in the engine from the 74 MGB, and I was able to drive the car to GT-48 in Memphis without issue. I even drove out to Tucumcari, New Mexico as I was unable to do that on the way to Colorado the previous year.



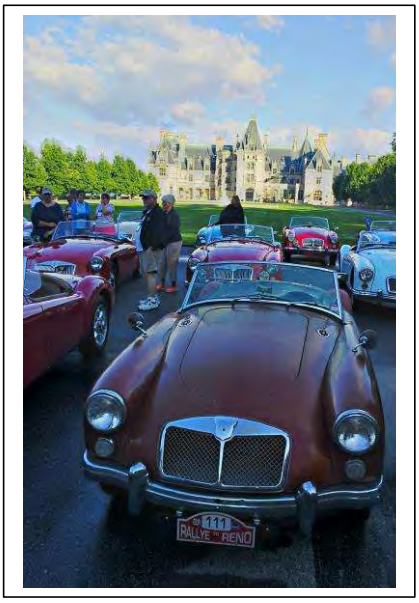
When the new engine was swapped in, I also put in an aluminum radiator, a plastic engine driven fan, and a fan shroud to improve the cooling. The fan installation was also notable as it was possible to put the fan on an MGB water pump and have it not too close to the stock MGA radiator position. I haven't had an issue with cooling since and the car runs at around 160 nearly all the time. It might possibly run too cool. I've been considering changing the thermostat to one rated at 190 degrees.

For GT-49 in Oregon, I had a couple minor issues, but all of that is detailed in recent articles.

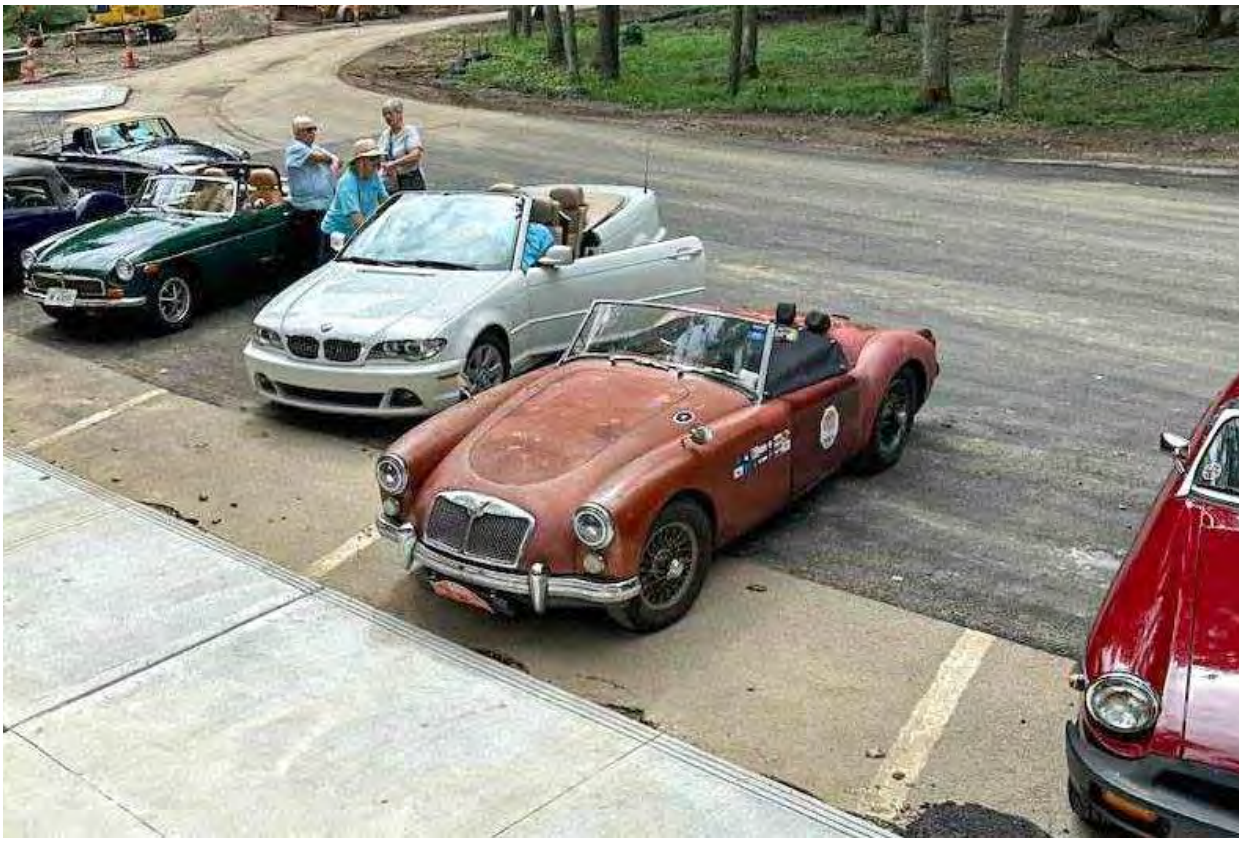
This winter I'm planning on installing a new wiring harness. I think I will remove the floors to help that process, and I might make new floors. I'll also install some insulation when I put the floors back in.

I don't recall when I got new wire wheels. The car came with chrome wire wheels, but they were not in great condition and I wanted to try the tubeless wire wheels. I've not had any trouble with those, but I did have trouble with my first set of tubeless tires. I bought cheap tires and all four of them needed to be replaced for issues other than wear. I've been running Vredesteins since and they have been without issue.

When I changed to the 1800 engine, I also installed an alternator to replace the stock generator. The alternator is a GM 10SI. Attaching the alternator to the engine required the GM J



bracket to hold the outer side, but cut down and with a new hole drilled. It also required a hinge point adapter. Having a 10SI in an MGA, particularly with the hinge point bracket I used did present issues. The 10SI is a larger diameter, and the hinge point adapter moves the alternator further away from the engine block. It becomes difficult to access the passenger side radiator mount and now with the fan shroud access is further restricted. I might have been better off going with a Lucas alternator, but I wanted one that would be available at parts stores. I don't think I've needed to replace the alternator, so being able to get a replacement has not been a benefit yet. But then the alternator has not broken either, so I'm still probably ahead. There are Japanese alternators that are very compact, although they are not cheap. I considered that as an alternative to the GM alternator, but as I've not had problems with the 10SI I probably will not change anything there.



Early on I put in a mesh grill to improve airflow to improve cooling. That most likely helped, but did not eliminate cooling issues. During the 1800 swap, or possibly before, I changed from the stock MGA 4.3 ring/pinion ratio to an MGB 3.9. In combination with the 1800 and the 5-speed, I'm running nearly the same running gear as an MGB, save for 5% taller tires. The car runs at 70 MPH in fifth gear when the engine is turning at 3000 RPM.

A couple years ago I got new gauges from SpeedHut. I was able to design the faces to look similar to stock, although I changed to a tan face with blue illuminated numbers. The red illuminated pointers also diverge from stock. I've been working on 3d printing a custom dash for the MGA. We'll have to see when I get around to finishing that.

Either when I installed the 1800, or earlier, I installed a gear reduction starter. That has worked without issue since it was put in. I also started using Pertronix electronic ignition modules pretty early and they've worked pretty well for me.

With all the travel to NAMGAR GTs the MGA has been as far West as I-5 through the three West Coast states and to the ocean in San Francisco. It has been as far east as Northwestern Rhode Island, and to the Atlantic Ocean in states from New Jersey to North Carolina. South as far as Gainesville, Florida and North to Calgary, Alberta. I've not driven the MGA to any of the corners of the Contiguous US (I've been to all four in other MGs), but it has been to the northern-most point in the Contiguous US, the Northwest Angle at the top of Minnesota. I don't know how many miles I've driven in the car, but the odometer has been in the car for two years and has over 16000 miles on it. I've driven coast to coast four times (three west and one east), and according to my notes I've had the car in 43 states plus the District of Columbia and five provinces of Canada. I've

driven at least one of my cars in 48 states and seven provinces, so the MGA accounts for quite a bit of that.

And I've had the top up at least twice.

Safety MG Fast